UNITED NATIONS **ST**

Secretariat

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INFORMATION CIRCULAR*

To: Members of the staff

From: The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management

Subject: COMPETITIVE EXAMINATION FOR PROMOTION TO THE PROFESSIONAL CATEGORY OF STAFF MEMBERS FROM OTHER CATEGORIES

1. In accordance with administrative instruction ST/AI/418 of 30 April 1997, the following information is provided on the format and procedures for the competitive examination for promotion to the Professional category of staff members from other categories to be held from 9 to 13 February 1998. As noted in that instruction, the following occupational groups have been selected:

(a) Administration, which covers work such as that of administrative officers, personnel officers, budget officers and project management officers;

(b) Electronic Data Processing, which covers work such as that of programme analysts, systems analysts and programmers;

(c) Finance, which covers work such as that of accountants, auditors and finance officers;

(d) Political Affairs, which covers work such as that of political affairs officers and liaison officers;

(e) Statistics, which covers work done by statisticians such as research, projections and compiling of data.

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* Expiration date of the present information circular: 30 November 1998.

A. Written examination

2. The written examination accounts for 80 per cent of the total number of points available for each occupational group and consists of two parts: a general paper (four hours) and a specialized paper (four hours) related to the occupational group concerned. An examination booklet will be distributed to the candidates at the beginning of each part of the written examinations. The examination must be written with black pen only in the designated parts of each booklet.

3. Part I, the general paper, comprises three sections with a total coefficient of 30 per cent:

(a) Section 1 will test candidates' ability to analyse a problem. This section consists of a text and questions based on the text. The time recommended for this section is 1 hour and 20 minutes and it has a coefficient of 10 per cent of the marks assigned to the examination;

(b) Section 2 consists of a text of a speech or a report. Candidates will be asked to summarize the text, reducing it to approximately one third of its length. The summary will be evaluated for comprehension, accuracy and clarity of thought. The time recommended for this section is 1 hour and 20 minutes and it has a coefficient of 10 per cent of the marks assigned to the examination;

(c) Section 3 deals with questions on international relations. Candidates may choose any 10 among 12 questions offered. The time recommended for this section is 1 hour and 20 minutes and it has a coefficient of 10 per cent of the marks assigned to the examination.

4. Part II, the specialized paper, which tests substantive knowledge of the occupational group concerned, normally consists of 3 essay-type exercises and 10 short-answer type questions. All essays and questions are mandatory. The total time recommended for this part is four hours and it has a coefficient of 50 per cent of the marks assigned to the examination.

5. As stated in paragraph 24 of administrative instruction ST/AI/418, candidates participating in the examination shall be permitted to take the examination in any of the working languages of the regional commissions, with due regard to the requirement of proficiency in one of the working languages of the Secretariat. In order to demonstrate such proficiency, all candidates will have to take section 2 (drafting test) in either English or French. Alternatively, candidates may elect to take the entire written examination (parts I and II) in a working language of a commission other than English or French and sit for a special language test in either English or French. This test consists of two parts covering, respectively, reading and writing abilities. The duration of the test is 2 hours and 30 minutes. Candidates who have not demonstrated proficiency in one of the working languages of the Secretariat (English or French) in the special language test or in the drafting test will be considered as not having met the standard required in the examination.

6. The exact time of the examinations will be adjusted for each examination centre, taking into account the various time zones, and will be communicated to each candidate. Candidates should arrive at the examination room in each centre at least half an hour in advance of the scheduled starting time and have with them a United Nations identification document, their convocation letter and pens.

7. The written examinations will be held at the designated examination centres for the occupational groups mentioned in paragraph 1. The tentative schedule is as follows:

General paper	11 February 1998
Administration	10 February 1998
Electronic Data Processing	9 February 1998
Finance	13 February 1998
Political Affairs	12 February 1998
Statistics	12 February 1998
Special language test	to be announced

The final schedule will be reflected in the convocation letters which will be sent to each candidate.

B. Oral examination

8. Candidates may be convoked for an oral examination in accordance with paragraph 14 (b) of administrative instruction ST/AI/418. Candidates serving at duty stations away from Headquarters will take this part of the examination either in New York or at another location, depending on circumstances. At locations away from Headquarters, the oral examination will be conducted by a board consisting of at least three members of the relevant board of examiners, including an ex officio member.

9. The oral examination is scheduled to be held in June/July 1998.

10. The oral examination will comprise two separate exercises: an oral presentation and a group exercise. The oral examination will constitute 20 per cent of the marks of the examination process. The oral presentation will account for 8 per cent of the points assigned to the oral examination, and the group exercise will account for 12 per cent of those points. The weight of the four performance dimensions measured by the group exercise, i.e., initiative, adaptability, negotiating skills and potential for leadership, will be equally distributed, with each performance dimension accounting for 3 per cent of the weight for the group exercise.

Oral presentation

11. For all occupational groups, the standardized format of the oral presentation will include a 10-minute presentation of a general nature on a topic broadly related to the occupational group concerned. Each candidate will draw two topics at random from a selection prepared in advance and choose one of the topics. The candidate will then have 15 minutes to prepare an oral

presentation on the selected topic. Following the presentation, the Board of Examiners will have an opportunity to ask three questions for clarification or amplification of any of the points made by the candidate. After the presentation and related questions, the Board will ask five other questions of a general nature also broadly related to the occupation and two questions for clarification or amplification of any points made during the five additional questions.

12. The presentation and responses to questions of the oral presentation will be evaluated in accordance with a rating scale designed to assess the candidate's ability to comprehend topics and questions, to communicate with others and to present and illustrate with examples his or her views in a clear, logical and understandable way. In order to ensure consistency, the marking will be done separately by each member of the board immediately after each oral presentation and without relation to the grading of the written examination.

Group exercise

13. The group exercise is a leaderless group, non-assigned role exercise. As designed for the oral examination, it will measure the performance dimensions of initiative, adaptability, negotiating skills and potential for leadership. Candidates will be assigned to groups ranging in size from three to six members.

14. The group exercise is a problem-solving exercise, in which a scenario describing a series of problems is presented to the group. The group is allowed a specified length of time to analyse and discuss the problems. The members must arrive at a solution to each problem presented in the exercise as a group, through group discussion. Once the solutions have been reached, depending upon the specific requirements of the exercise, a presentation/discussion/report will be generated to be presented to the board members.

15. Groups may be constituted of candidates drawn from one or several occupational groups.

16. If a candidate is convoked at the oral examination in two occupational groups, scores obtained in the group exercise portion of the oral examination will be applied to both occupational groups.

Group exercise rating process

17. Candidates participating in the group exercise will be evaluated by a special board made up of members who have received full training in the group exercise methodology. The training will focus on teaching the members to identify, observe, assess, rate and record specific behaviours related to the above-mentioned performance dimensions.

18. During the group exercise itself, the board members will be observing the behaviour of each member in the group, relative to the performance dimensions, and making notes on each candidate's behaviour.

19. Upon completion of the exercise, the board members will rate, on predetermined scales, the behaviour of each candidate according to the appropriate performance dimensions.

20. The board members will discuss their ratings and, where discrepancies in ratings occur, will reconcile the ratings. After reconciliation takes place, a total score will be calculated on the basis of the reconciled ratings.

Use of languages

21. Candidates may make the individual oral presentation in English, in French or in one of the working languages of the regional commissions other than English or French. In the group exercise candidates must converse in either English or French. Language will be taken into consideration when constituting groups for the group exercise.